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BLM ANNOUNCES PERMANENT TARGET SHOOTING CLOSURES

The Bureau of Land Management has decided to make permanent its emergency target shooting closures on three recreation areas north of Billings. The three areas are the 21-Mile, Shepherd Ah Nei, and Acton Recreation Areas.

The BLM, with the assistance of the Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council, developed alternatives and analyzed the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed firearms target shooting closure. The EA was released December 17. The decision accompanying the EA restricts target shooting year-round in all three areas. Hunting will be allowed during seasons established by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP). The closure does not include the area commonly used for target shooting known as the 17-Mile area, located on the Crooked Creek Road west of Highway 87 north of Billings.

In late 2002, Billings Field Manager Sandy Brooks placed an emergency firearms target shooting closure on the three areas. At that time, the areas were used for recreational hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, off-highway vehicle use, wildlife viewing and hunting, and random target shooting. "Hikers, horseback riders, and other users can plan their activities around hunting seasons, but it's impossible for them to know when and where target shooters are also using the area," Brooks stated. "There have been some recent incidents in which recreationists or adjacent landowners were endangered or injured by target shooting. In order to provide for public safety, it's necessary to temporarily close the areas to target shooting while we find a permanent solution to the problems."

The complete text of the EA and Decision Record can be found on the BLM's website at www.mt.blm.gov or be obtained by calling the Billings Field Office at 896-5013. Members of the public have 30 days in which to appeal the decision. Information on appeal procedures may also be found on the website.

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